who says this, saying it's me?

st261.1.68

sumtone

:

michael edwards

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for tenor saxophone and
quadraphonic sound files

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programme note

Michael Edwards (1968)
who says this, saying it's me?
for tenor saxophone and quadraphonic sound files (2009)

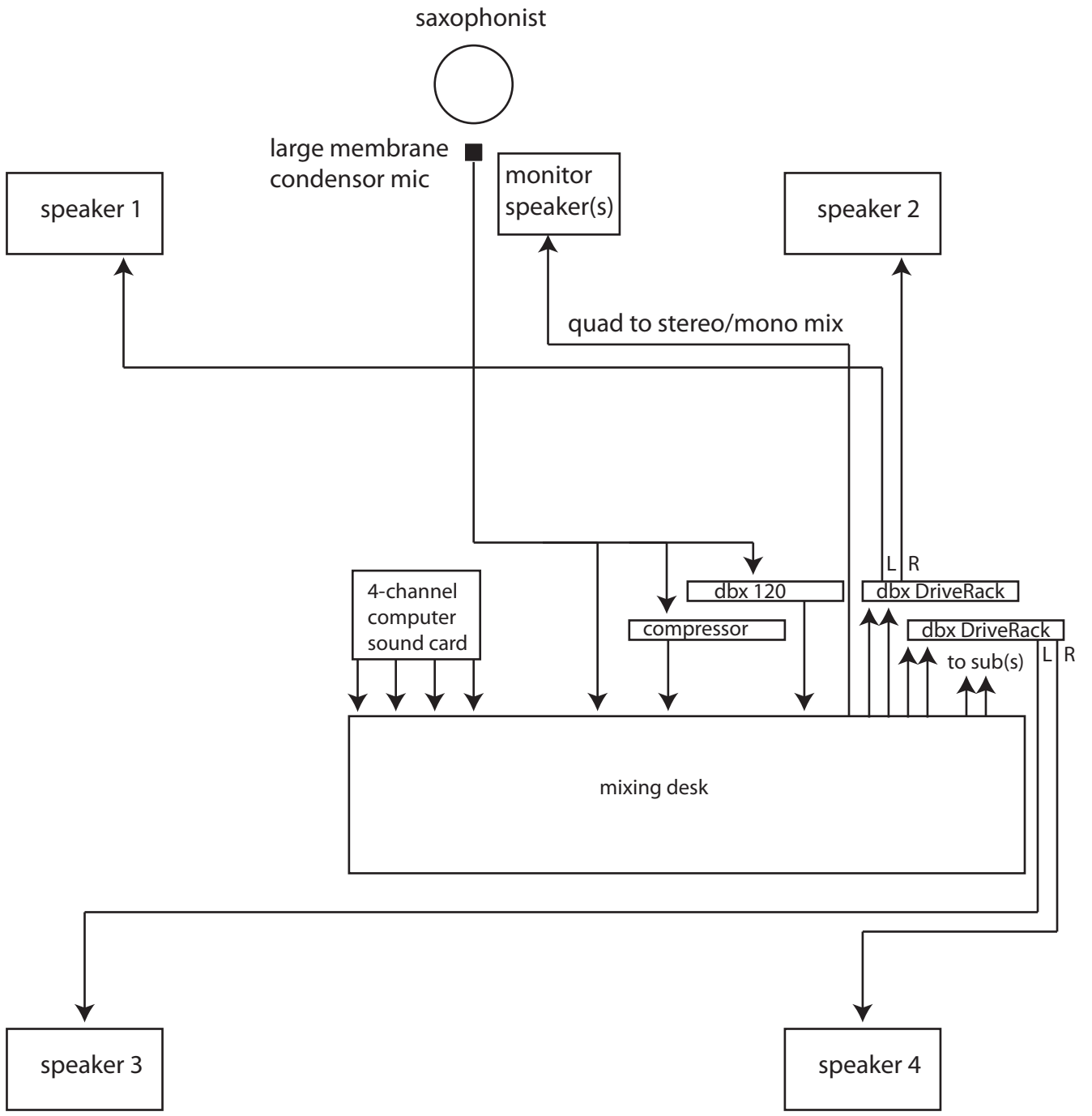
"Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying it's me?"
Samuel Beckett, opening of Texts for Nothing 4

Composers' concentration on the musical text and the general perception of composers as exclusive musical visionaries who set down notes which performers need only play in the right order and with the required precision in order to succeed, greatly obscures the role of the performer and all s/he brings to a piece of composed music. We can see this not just in terms of conscious interpretation, but centuries of mostly undocumented and implied performance practice; all the intricate details which need to be mastered to bring music to life, but which are not to be found on the page. Anyone who has heard a machine performance of a well-known piece immediately hears and understands this.

In more and more of my recent works I treat the score not as an ideal which must be achieved but as a system to strive against which leads to expressive yet often out-of-control situations. All the usual notational details are present and most are quite simple (this is not the New Complexity); there is nothing aleatoric or random about the score, but one or two of the performance parameters will be extreme. In this piece, the speed at which musical material is to be presented is such that the performer is forced to skim, to improvise even, to react to the score rather than simply (!) play it. The intention is for an unusual energy and tension to arise, along with unimaginable and perhaps unnotatable instrumental sounds.

The saxophone as we know it is slowly revealed through various more unusual views of the instrument, as a technological extension of the human vocal apparatus, and as a resonating tube. Each of the six sections proceed via the same but ever-shortening algorithm: a two-in-one-voice hocket-like exchange of foreground and background notes, most often in different registers. Both saxophone and computer play through the same basic material but this is obscured in the former by a superimposed note-rejection procedure and in the latter by intentionally programmed rhythmic sloppiness. The obscuring reduces over the course of the piece until in the final section the computer and saxophone are locked in a uni-rhythmic and euphoric mêlée of sharply accented, ever-changing metrical assaults. Whose music you are hearing though—mine or the performer's—is open to question.

Signal Schematic
who says this, saying it's me
for tenor saxophone and computer



The incoming sax signal needs to be split (by unity gain aux sends or something similar) and sent to the dbx 120 and the compressor independently. The returns from these processors need to be controlled by separate faders. The compression used is extreme: high ratio, quick attack, high make-up gain; this is so that plenty of signal is available during the quiet sax sections without risking clipping or sudden loud attacks; it will also provide parallel compression by being used in conjunction with the uncompressed sax signal. The dbx 120 is a subharmonic synthesizer. It is used to process the sax signal only during section E.

The two dbx DriveRacks should be used mainly as feedback suppressors but may also be useful for tuning the room through their auto-eq function.

The one or two subwoofers will need to be controllable by separate mixing desk faders.

performance requirements

- a four-channel playback system. most probably fed by the max/msp5 patch providing visual cues with the sound files (available from the composer); a Nuendo file with all meter and tempo information is also available for easy bar cueing. N.B. the four channels may be mixed onto two if only stereo playback is available.
- 1 high-quality (prefereably large-membrane) microphone with high-quality pre-amp.
- 1 dynamic compressor: high-quality analogue hardware preferred.
- 1 dbx 120 subharmonic synthesiser (optional: see section E).
- 2 dbx DriveRacks or similar room-tuning/feedback suppressor system capable of processing a total of four channels (optional).
- 1 or 2 subwoofers capable of frequencies down to at least 30Hz; the levels for these should be on separate faders on the mixing desk so that they can be controlled during the performance.

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michael edwards 2009

♩. = 151 / ♩ = 227 *2 Dark, suffocating, nervous, fighting, rushing

Tenor Saxophone

Tongue, closed *1

"pp"

bass synth *4

distant wind tone

"mp" *3

"pp"

♪ = ♪ sempre *5

quiet click

quiet click knocking begins

quiet breath

quiet scratch

bass synth

quiet scratch

quiet breath

"pp" sub

"mf"

distant wind tone

*6

*7

grace note to wind tone

bang + delay

"ff"

mouth noise

"pp" sub

high squeek tone + bass synth

*8

"p"

"mf"

bass synth

bass synth

quiet breath

"pp"

"p"

noise synth

louder brighter breath + bass synth

mouth noise + bass synth

"pp"

suddenly brighter

"mp"

*1 Very closed embouchure, tongue closing reed against mouthpiece but varying position (ad lib); high pressure blowing--also varying--but mostly no air can get through instrument, thus tongue/mouth/reed noises escape at unpredictable intervals: highly amplified (compressed). Breathing should not be accompanied by release of embouchure, rather it should occur through the nose whenever necessary during/after a note (though embouchure can of course be released during rests); breathing should also be sonically audible and incorporated into the musical tension. The cross note heads represent fingering and a slight opening of the reed to allow air through the instrument and a louder sonic event (though this may be no more than a squeek and should be part of the uninterrupted breath, not a separately articulated event).

*2 There is an implicit slight accelerando through every section; follow the pulse in the electronic sounds.

*3 Quoted dynamics and dashed hairpins indicate intensity level and/or increase/decrease of breath pressure on the (closed) reed, with attendant increase/decrease of mouth noise etc.; in general more/less intensity/pressure/accidents.

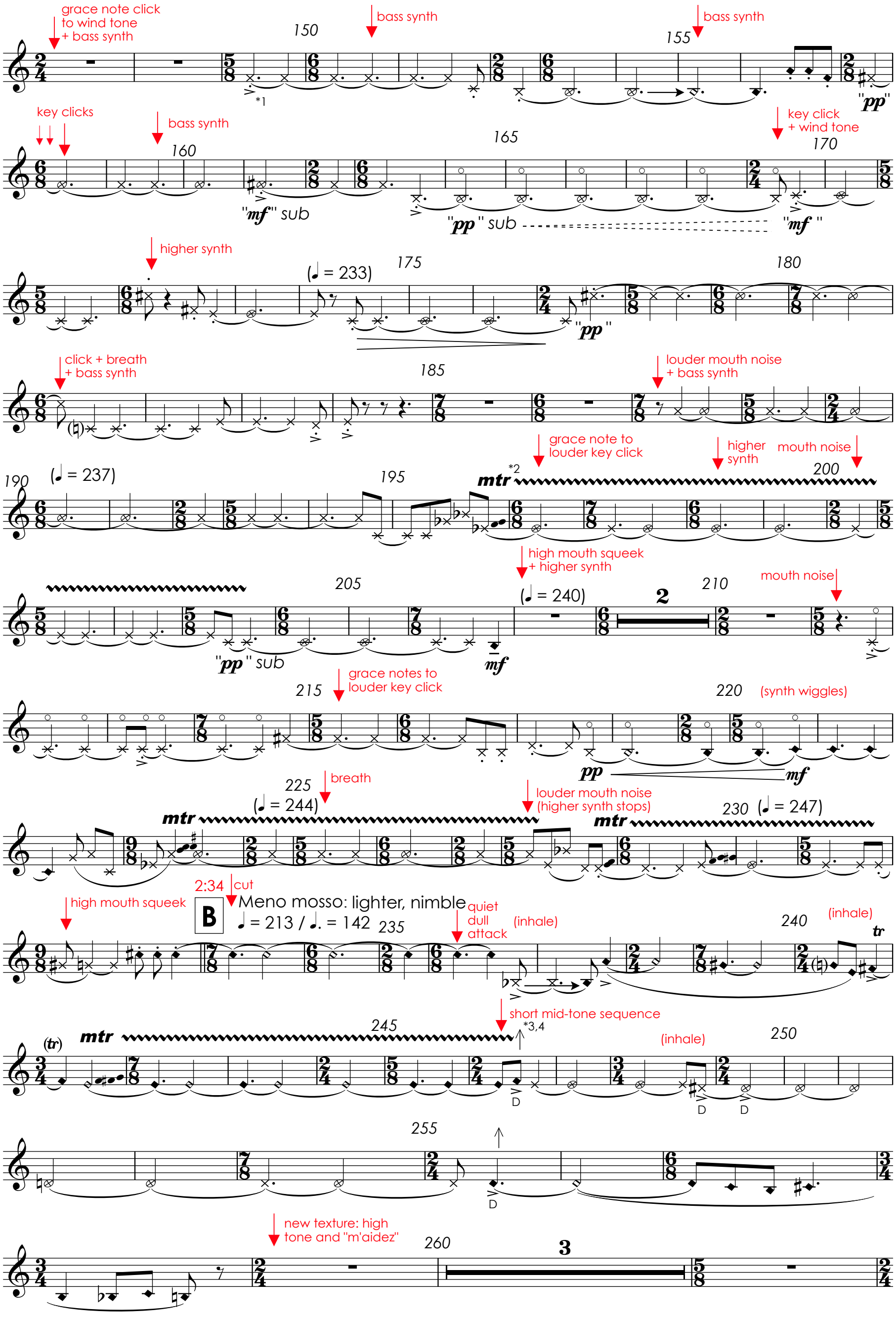
*4 All directions in red refer to events in the sound files and are intended to aid synchronisation.

*5 The metric switch from ♩. beats to ♩ beats should be physically felt and evident in the musical tension: an increase in activity and speed up of pulse occurs in the e.g. 4/8 bars despite the fact that very little is conventionally audible. All through this first part of the piece you should be counting through and playing as if miming to some inaudible but highly energetic and rhythmic music.

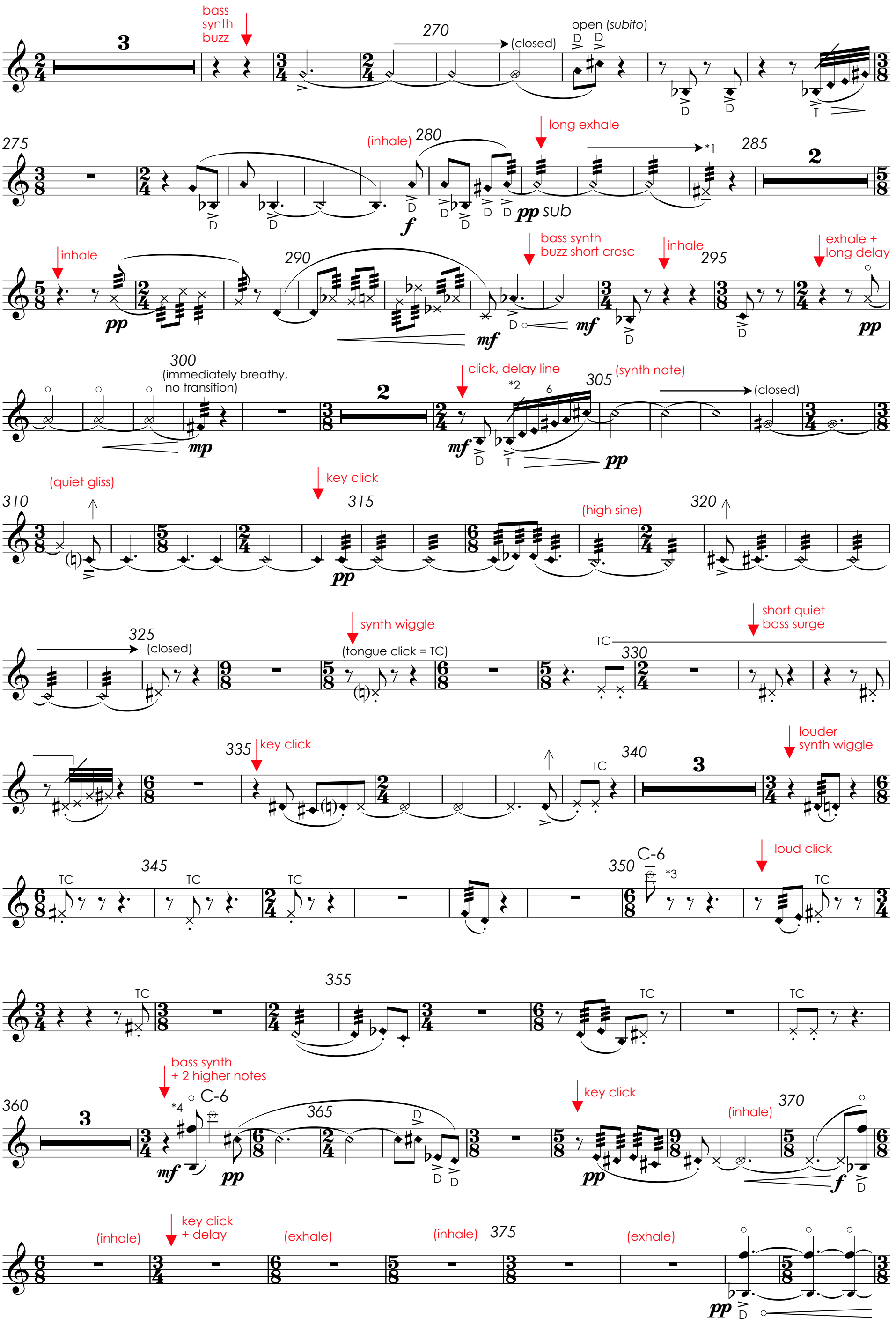
*6 Staccato implies a separate, short, tongue articulation.

*7 Diamond note heads indicate air flowing more freely through the instrument: subtle at first, still 'pinched', only full-blown after section B.

*8 Harmonic sign means try to inject a squeezed high tone into the sound; as with all these playing states, this does not have to be present and unchanging throughout the whole note, rather it is an approach to playing which creates sounds constantly in flux, including "accidents".



*1 Accented staccato implies a stronger attack with the tongue slightly releasing and allowing a pop or similar sound to escape.
*2 ***mtr*** or "multi-trill" means trill on more than one note: concentrate on the normal two trill notes but intersperse the others indicated at irregular intervals.
*3 Breathe in through instrument, audibly; lasts only for duration of note the arrow is attached to i.e. breathe out/play normally immediately on the following note.
*4 "D" with an accent means "diaphragm accent" i.e. not tongued. "T" (for tongue) may be used to explicitly cancel diaphragm accents where the context is not clear.



*1 Try to move from an open breath-only flutter tongue to a more closed, even squeeky flutter.
*2 Quick runs are intended to be throwaway: like grace notes.
*3 Multiphonic. Written note is one of the principle pitches in the sound. Fingering is indicated based on a basic low note fingering minus various fingers; SB♭=side B♭; F=Alt F.
Just a hint of multiphonic at this stage i.e. mostly breath.
*4 Over all normal noteheads the harmonic sign indicates a normal harmonic; the smaller note is the fingered pitch, the note above the sounding.

loud click and heavy bass

380

D♯-3 (♩ = 217)

pp sub

mp

B♭-C

385

(breath)

3 key clicks

f pp sub

fp

pp

390

click and surge (♩ = 220)

395

400

click

B♭-C

405

click + delay

(inhale)

410

4

(♩ = 223)

415

click + delay

420

2

click sequence

leggero

p

425

click

2 clicks

(exhale)

(exhale)

click + delay

430

(inhale)

forced

mf

closed notes now becoming quite wild and unpredictable

435

(♩ = 229)

D♯-3

440

445

2

(♩ = 232)

(inhale)

450

(exhale)

2

(♩ = 235)

(further inhale/exhales)

2

5

*1 Add a little bit of pitched harmonic to the basic breathy sound.

5:05 big exhale + tone

Despite prevailing tempo, more relaxed, noble even

C Meno mosso ♩ = 201

C-4 *1 ST *2 C-4 D 465 low click *3

pp

(breath surge) C-6 470 click 475 click C-4

mp pp sub

2 480 2 bass thud 485 ST C-4

pp

bass thud 490 C-6 C-4 C-6 C-4 C-6 495 C-4 mid short tone C-6 D♯-3 high click + delay 500 ST D♯-3 D D♯-2

mp pp sub

short tone + key clicks

high click + delay 6 510 D♯-3 C-6 B-4-C+F 515 C-6 B-4-C+F 2

pp pp

high click + delay + key click sequence B-4-C+F 520 3 short knock B-4-C+F D♯-3

pp pp

key clicks B-4-C+F D♯-3 530 C-6 C-6 C-6 535 B-4-C+F D♯-3 sim C-4 short high + delay B♭-C B-4-C+F D♯-3

short high + delay B♭-C B♭-6+SB♭ B♭-C 540 B♭-6+SB♭ D♯-3 545 B♭-6+SB♭ B-4-C+F short mid tone + delay B♭-C B-4-C+F D♯-3 D♯-2

pp pp

(high held whirring sound emerges)

B♭-6+SB♭ B♭-C B-4-C+F D♯-3 550 D♯-2 bass thud B♭-6+SB♭ B♭-C 555 D D C-6 C-4 C-6 C-4 + C-6 560 C-6

*4

B♭-6+SB♭ D♯-3 sim B♭-C B♭-6+SB♭ D♯-3 B♭-C 565 D♯-2 B♭-6+SB♭ D♯-3 sim click + delay short mid tone B♭-6+SB♭ 570 B♭-C B♭-6+SB♭

mf pp

short high + delay B♭-C 2 B♭-6+SB♭ B♭-C

ppp

sim D♯-2 D♯-3 580 C-6 C-4 C-6

pp

*1 ST = subtone.
*2 Unless a new multiphonic is indicated, always play the last notated.
*3 Over any held multiphonic, always 'modulate' (synthesiser-like) the tone ad lib by varying the amount of fundamental and harmonic content. The extent of this modulation should be reflected by the prevailing dynamic. Where deemed appropriate, a growl tone may also be added.
*4 The + sign indicates slap tongue.

C-4 C-6 C-4 short high + delay D C-6 C-4 D C-6 C-4 585 C-6 C-4 (high whirring sound louder and gliss) 6 louder bass thuds D D C#-5 C#-5+E *1

mf sub pp mf pp mf pp mf

590 C#-5 595 B-4-C+F short high + delay

(♩ = 204)

D♯-3 B♭-6+SB♭ 600 D♯-3 B♭-6+SB♭ sim B♭-C 605

short mid tone + delay dance-like; delicate B♭-6+SB♭ B-4-C+F D♯-3 B♭-C D♯-2 610 B-4-C+F D♯-3 B♭-C D♯-2 B-4-C+F D♯-2 mid tone then short high + delay (♩ = 207) B-4-C+F D♯-3

615 C-4 D♯-3 C-4 B-4-C+F +D♯-D♯ +D♯-D♯ C♯-5 +E -E +E -E+E -E C-6 620 key clicks C♯-5 C-6

B-4-C+F +D♯ -D♯+D♯ mf -D♯+D♯ -D♯ C♯-5 625 +E-E B♭-C B♭-6+SB♭ B♭-C + B♭-6+SB♭ pp bass thud B♭-C B♭-6+SB♭ B-4-C+F

♩ = 209

630 B♭-C B♭-6+SB♭ sim mid click + reverb 635 D♯-3 D♯-2 f fpp B-4-C+F

♩ = 212 mid tone + delay B-4-C+F B-4-C+F 645 breathy clicks (with pre-echo 2 ♪'s earlier)

650 ♩ = 215 click + breath tone 655 short mid tone + delay

660 (warm slight surge) (♩ = 217) (repeated knocking; bass pulses; cresc. scraped string sound leads into next section)

675
(♩ = 220)
7:36
D
key clicks
Full on, fairly wild
Meno mosso ♩ = 191
680
(♩ = 223)
short mid tone + delay
685
C-6
C-6
key click + delay
690
C-4
*1
click + delay
695
700
knock + delay
N *2
C-4
Bb-C
knock + delay
C-6
710
C-4
click + delay
knock + delay
N
715
C-6
knock + delay
Bb-C
720
C-6
Bb-C
C-6
knock + delay then sub pp
(held mid-high tone)
ghost-like
C♯-5+E
C♯-5
C-6
C♯-5
730
C♯-5
C♯-5+E
C♯-5
735
C♯-5
C♯-5+E
short mid tone + delay
740
C♯-5
C♯-5+E
C-6
C-6
C♯-5+E
click + delay
745
C♯-5
D
short low tone
D♯-3
B♭-6+SB♭
C-6
D♯-3
755
ST
B♭-6+SB♭
C♯-5+E
C♯-5
ST
760
B♭-6+SB♭
ST
knock
sub f: 3 bass pulses
C-6
B♭-6+SB♭
765
C♯-5
B♭-6+SB♭
C♯-5
C♯-5+E
(sax phrase)
770
knock + delay
775
knock + delay
D♯-3

*1 A thick wavy line indicates a growl tone i.e. sing/growl tone in throat whilst playing.
*2 N means normal fingering for a note i.e. to clarify after e.g. a harmonic.
*3 No octave key on the octaves. Where an octave is indicated with two normal size note heads, aim for a 50/50 mix of fundamental and first harmonic.

780

785

knock + delay

p<f

f

piano delay
+ sub pp

790

mouth noise

knock + delay

f

fp

fp

f

795

short low tone + delay

800

knock
+ delay

(silly bass synth tune)

805

N

ff

sfp<

knock + delay

D

810

mid tone + delay

♩ = 194

B♭-C

f

f

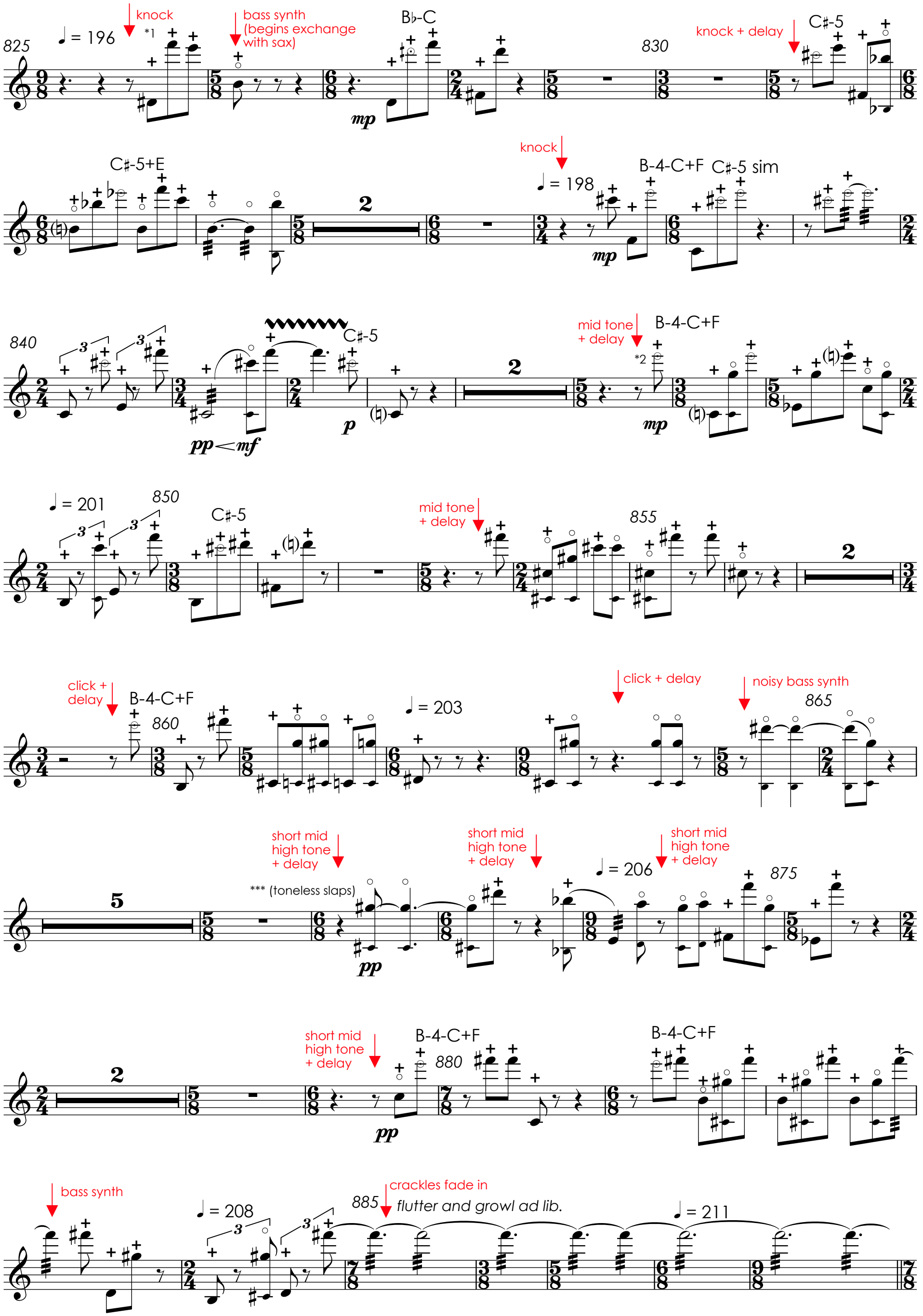
knock + delay+ texture change (p)

815

2

2

2



*1 Until letter E: slaps no longer so aggressive: more clicks than loud snaps.
* 2 From here until *** reduce the pitch content until all slaps are toneless hollow clicks.

10:04

E Close to mic; deeply resonant Engineer: fade in subharmonic synthesiser

Meno mosso ♩ = 181

890 crackles end; piano tone starts

*1

pp

895 short high tone + delay (air only)

mp

(ringing rhythmic high sines)

900 TC (= tongue clicks)

pp

905 key click + delay

910

mf pp

key click + delay

915

920

925 key click

mf

mtr

930

pp mp pp

key click

935 TC

mtr

pp mp

key click

940

2

pp mp

945

pp ppp

950 key click; texture change: bass synth held grunt TC

3

pp

955 click + delay

mp

960 key click

mf

TC (breath attacks)

pp

TC

mp

TC

pp

key click

(bass synth)

pp

970 key click

TC TC

pp mf

TC TC

975

f

3 3

pp

key click (breaths stop)

key click + breath noise

3

p

TC

2

985

pp

TC

TC

TC

TC

mf

(delays)

990

TC

f

TC

ff

TC

p

995

TC

TC

f

TC

(♮)

TC

p

key click; bass synth

1000

2

key click

*1 Square noteheads indicate exaggerated key click noise only i.e. no tone unless otherwise indicated. Dynamics indicate the sounding level, so adjust effort to achieve those indicated. To maximise the resonance the reed should be closed with the tongue and the fingered note approached from a fingering diametrcally opposed i.e. from all fingers off to all on or vice-versa. From the start of this section, the engineer should quickly but unobtrusively fade in the subharmonic synthesiser creating deep bass resonances from the key clicks. The subharmonics last until the beginning of section F.

1005 key click; delay (♩ = 183) mtr TC TC 1010 (high rhythmic sines) TC TC TC TC 2

1015 (high rhythmic sines) key click + delay 1020 (♩ = 185)

1025 mtr TC TC 1030 TC key click TC TC

2 key clicks

1035 1040 + breath TC

1045 knock mtr (♩ = 189) 1050 5 1055 2 key clicks TC

(♩ = 192) 3 key clicks TC 1060 TC TC 1065

B♭-C 2 key clicks + delay (air) 1070 1075

2 key clicks TC 3 3 key clicks TC 1080 1085 TC

(♩ = 196) key click + delay (noise filter gliss) TC TC 1090 TC TC

key click + delay 1095 (continuous high noise) 5 1100 (GP) ♩ = 199 8

Engineer: fade out subharmonic synthesiser

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12:31 short high FM drum attack (applies to all following cues unless otherwise indicated)

F Meno mosso ♩ = 169 Rough tone (slight growl)

1110 *f ben marcato* click + delay (FM drum) *ff f ff*

1115 *f ff f* 1120 N N

bass pulse (FM drum) 1125 (more extreme growl)

1130 (held whirring) 1135 *f*

1140 knock + delay 1145

1150 1155 *ff*

(held whirring) 6 *mf* 1165 cresc very high short note + delay

1170 very high 1175 *ff p ff*

1180 short note + delay *ff* 1185 *sfzp f*

1190 "m'aidez" 1195 *sfzp f* *2 gliss. B♭-C

1200 C♯-5 B-4+C+F C♯-5 1205 *f* mtr

*1 Ossia: play the higher notes with the usual fingerings instead of as harmonics; however it is preferable to attempt the harmonics and fail occasionally than just to play safe. The most important thing is that the jumps from high to low result in a feeling of two-part counterpoint; if the harmonics are not sure enough and the fundamentals come through too much or often, this will be destroyed; in that case the normal high note fingerings are preferable.

*2 The gliss here refers to the pitch of the growled/sung tone though a lip gliss would be effective too.

mtr

1210

1215

(♩ = 171)

1220

mtr

gliss.

1225

1230

(♩ = 173)

1235

f

1240

(bass synth rub)

1245

(♩ = 175)

bass synth cutoff
sub p; pulses

1250

2

f

1260

(bass synth rub)

+ delay

1265

(♩ = 179)

1270

1275

1280

1285

(♩ = 182)

(distant delays; pp)

14

♩ = ♩. (♩. = 182)

sim

1305

ff

2 mid-low synth notes
descending semitone

1310

(♩. = 188)